

Improving Social Media Health Communication to Young People: A Co-designed Framework

Background: Social media became a key communication channel for public health agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for reaching younger populations less engaged with traditional channels. However, official social media health communication often fails to appeal to this priority population and need to be improved for future health emergency contexts. This study aimed to co-design a social media communication framework for health messaging to young people with consideration to emergency settings. It integrated the perspectives of young people and health communicators responsible for social media messaging of government health departments.

Methods: An iterative co-design process was conducted in partnership with youth co-researchers. The framework was co-designed over three workshops with young people (18–24 years) and health communicators. Workshop data were analysed collaboratively and the framework was updated iteratively following each workshop.

Results: Twenty-one young people and four health communicators participated in workshops. Five recommendations for communicating health messages to young people on social media were developed following two iterations: (1) involve young people, (2) pitch at right level, (3) capture attention fast, (4) use current social media marketing techniques and (5) engage more with the public. The main barrier in emergency contexts was time constraints, but the recommendations were considered feasible if embedded in business-as-usual processes prior to the emergency.

Conclusion: These findings provide public health agencies a guide for health communication to young people on social media. Co-designing the recommendations centred the needs and preferences of young people, while ensuring they are feasible for health communicators.